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[Meeting Minutes of General Committee, May 14, 1969]

General Committee, Sarah Lawrence College

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Minutes

General Committee Meeting, May 14, 1969, 10:00-12:00

Present: Dean Mattfeld, Mr. [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED],
Mrs. [REDACTED], Mr. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED],
[REDACTED]. Mrs. Raushenbush presided.

Present by invitation: Mrs. [REDACTED], Mrs. [REDACTED], Mr. [REDACTED].

1. Minutes of the meeting of May 7 were approved.
2. It was agreed that the faculty should have a special meeting at the President's House on Thursday, May 15, from 4:00-6:00, have dinner there, and continue to meet in the evening if necessary. The Action Group will meet on Tuesdays from 4:00-6:00 in Westlands 205 and will be asked to reserve the evening if necessary. The Action Group will recommend regular participation of interested faculty and students from all programs of the College.

3. Lynd House Sit-In

Mrs. Raushenbush: I spent most of yesterday in conversations with various people. We had a meeting in the morning--Mr. DeCarlo, Mrs. [REDACTED], Mr. [REDACTED], and a number of people who were around--where the discussion centered principally on the interest and role of the Institute, the attitude of students toward the Institute, and those who have the most interest in it. It showed up the sort of basic and deep-going difficulty we have now that is greater than it used to be in the past, in an effort to establish good working relations among black people and white people and the problems they have. I felt at the time that some of these problems, as they were related to the Institute, were enormously great and could not be settled by good will because they strike at things very deep. That meeting did not come to any conclusion. Mr. DeCarlo was here all day. After that meeting I met with a couple of the black students who came to see me. I am impressed by the sensible effort of these girls to come to some solution about the troubles. Word had gotten around that I was going to take some action. We saw a police car on campus and immediately people thought we had called the police. Mr. [REDACTED] told the police to go away and not come back. Later we heard that some plainclothesmen were at Lynd taking pictures of people; I promptly went over but nobody had seen any photographers. Later in the day we had a rumpus because a girl who lives in Lynd was standing in the hall there waiting for someone when one of the girls sitting in told her to go away; she said she lived there and wouldn't, so the girl walloped her. She wasn't hurt but was upset. Unfortunately there were two Times reporters there at that moment. They did not

name the girl who did the punching but only the girl who was punched. I had several telephone calls from irate fathers. I was worried about one whose daughter was in Lynd. He said if I didn't call the police he would. I said I hoped he understood it would cause more trouble than not. He came down and visited his daughter at Lynd-- she was just getting over mononucleosis and he was worried about her. Her father said the place was a shambles and that the girls living peacefully in the house should not be subjected to this sort of thing. I called the girls and asked them to vacate the house (I was afraid he might call the police and get the girls in trouble); I told them exactly why I was anxious and why I felt they should leave. One of them, the roommate of the one whose father came down, said she would call him and say they were staying on their own responsibility. Some of the girls were afraid, not only of being arrested but of what could happen.

Mrs. [REDACTED] - Had you requested the girls sitting in to leave at that point?

Mrs. Raushenbush - I sent a note to the girls sitting in which quoted from my statement to the students (copy attached to official minutes). Then I said that I thought it would be in the interest of what they were concerned with, and what the whole College was concerned with, for them to leave Lynd House. I am holding to this. Today I am taking action. The black students outside Lynd were enormously involved and concerned, in the best possible way, about this. Also, I had not responded saying what we would do. Also, discussions were going on about what we should do. We talked all day yesterday. When the black students came to see me, they spoke of their attitude toward the work of the Institute; they were sympathetic toward the position of the sit-in students on the matter of the Institute, and I believe the black faculty are also critical on the same grounds. My belief is that the black faculty have, on their own, had the same criticisms of the Institute in relation to black people, and in addition the black faculty felt, for the sake of the life of the black students, that they would want to support what the black students wanted whether or not they agreed with their intellectual position. There was therefore very strong feeling on the part of all black people on the campus.

About three weeks ago Mr. DeCarlo, Mrs. Mattfeld, Mrs. Richter, Mr. [REDACTED] and I had a long conversation about the Institute over at Lynd House. It was our general feeling that the present relation of the Institute to the College and the community needed to be changed. We agreed that if there is to be any kind of institute in this community it ought to be a consortium, that a number of institutions ought to be involved in it, not just Sarah Lawrence. We had already talked about trying to find some way in which this

could come out. I mention it because the matter had already arisen. As a result of yesterday's discussions, we have decided to close the Institute. I have now sent a notice to the faculty and students saying so; in addition I am sending a longer notice explaining this (copies of memos attached to official minutes).

Mr. [REDACTED] - Would the Institute have been closed without the sit-in?

Mrs. Raushenbush - I don't know; not right now. But I believe it would have had to be reconstituted in some way. It is closed as of now. I should say that before we made this decision, when the black students came to me and we talked the whole thing out, they said they wanted to talk to the people at Lynd House and try to get them out. After an hour they came back and said they had no luck. Mr. [REDACTED], Mr. DeCarlo, Mrs. Mattfeld and I were present at all these meetings. We then discussed the question of closing the Institute. We agreed we would recommend this. We then had a long evening meeting with Mr. [REDACTED] and Mrs. [REDACTED], his assistant, and that was the agreement we all came to.

[REDACTED] offered to be the liaison person. About midnight I gave her this message over the phone:

The College has decided to close the Institute for Community Studies. If the Mount Vernon community wishes to create and direct such an institute and wishes to call on the resources of Sarah Lawrence College for professional aid, the College will be glad to respond.

Mr. [REDACTED] will, as an individual researcher, complete the projects drawing to a close in Mount Vernon this spring, but will not undertake new ones.

[REDACTED] was to take this to the girls in Lynd House but they were unwilling to receive it because it did not have my signature, so I said come over and I will type and sign it. She then took it over. This morning there have been things crossing in the mail. After the first message came their response:

To: Esther Raushenbush and the Black Students Association
From: The Spirit of the People Occupying a Portion of Lynd House and the Sarah Lawrence Institute for Community Studies

At this time we feel that Mrs. Raushenbush has made a definite effort towards answering our non-negotiable demand. There are two more points which must be clarified before we feel we can vacate the premises:

1. The college must respond gladly to all surrounding communities that have been exploited by the Sarah Lawrence Institute for Community Studies (not just Mt. Vernon).
2. Before any group can create and direct the Institute when reopened, the response to that group must come from the President of the College and the Black Students Association.

We would like to say, at this time, that we appreciate and acknowledge efforts made on our behalf. We are now only awaiting answers to these two points.

(Mrs. Raushenbush read a draft of her proposed response to this memo.)

Mrs. Raushenbush It has been my intention to say that if I do not hear from them at the time I said I wanted to, that I would write and say unless they vacate Lynd by noon today they will be suspended from the College. I have called the dons of the students and they have all agreed it was the appropriate action. Circumstances of the suspension will be settled after discussion by a Board appointed by the President, of which a student's don would be a part, any faculty member she wishes to name, and any student she wishes to name.

Mr. [REDACTED] - From the point of view of this moment in history I agree with this, but I believe the closing of the Institute is a total loss to the community and to the College.

Mrs. Raushenbush - I absolutely agree with you; it is a step backward. I think we are not ready yet for community control of an institute and may never be.

Mrs. [REDACTED] - This is setting back the College and community relations enormously. It is much more destructive than positive.

After further discussion it was agreed that the following statement should be sent to the students sitting in at Lynd House:

The following statements are an attempt to clarify our position as requested in your memo received this morning:

1. The College will of course respond, to the limits of its competency, to any or all surrounding communities which request its professional assistance. We cannot agree with the charge that the Sarah Lawrence Institute has exploited the people of these communities. This College has been and remains opposed to the exploitation of any people.

2. In the event that one or more communities establish and direct a new institute and request professional assistance of Sarah Lawrence College, the response to this request will be made by the President of the College and the Black Students Association (when the BSA feels the project relevant). The President will also consult with other appropriate faculty, students and administrative groups.

Now that we have clarified these two points, we expect you to leave Lynd House by one o'clock.

3. It was agreed that an all-College meeting should not be held this afternoon. The meeting will be unnecessary since the memo explaining the closing of the Institute is to be sent to the entire College community.
4. Mrs. [REDACTED] suggested having a meeting with the students and psychiatrists concerning current tensions. Mrs. Raushenbush asked that Mrs. [REDACTED] and Mrs. [REDACTED] set up a series of sessions, with whatever people outside that College can be helpful.